



Women In Church Leadership

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explain and support Emmanuel Faith's position on Women in Church Leadership. We will examine the related biblical passages that have led our Board of Elders to embrace some new postures toward women in church leadership at Emmanuel Faith Community Church.

The journey of growing in our perspectives and expanding the roles of women in leadership at Emmanuel Faith began years ago. Pastor Dennis Keating recognized the need to bring a female director onto the church's Ministry Management Team (which functioned like our Leadership Team of today). In 2014, the Board of Elders adopted a policy on "Credentialing for Gospel Ministry" in which women were allowed to be officially credentialed in the eyes of the state as ministers of the gospel. Throughout the years, the Elders have had numerous meaningful conversations about the topics covered in this document, and in 2020 the Board decided to dive into the Scriptures and study this important topic.

We embarked on this study because we became aware of three disparities and one hope for our church. First, there was a disparity between what we were asking women to do in their roles at Emmanuel Faith and the titles that we were allowed to use for them. We had multiple women who were pastoring people, but we couldn't call them "Pastor" because that title was only available to men. Secondly, the elders became aware that we didn't have an agreed upon and elder-sanctioned position of our view of women in church leadership. We had a long tradition of praxis and teaching on pertinent passages, but no official position. Finally, a disparity was seen in the fact that God kept raising up gifted, qualified, and educated women on our team, but we were not able to allow them to use some of those gifts in ministry. Our hope is that young women growing up in our kids and youth programs today would have the freedom to fully explore their gifts and the calling that God places on their lives. We live in a day and age when we need more people living as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not less.

For more than two years, the Board of Elders studied. We looked at all of the relevant Biblical passages, we read various books and articles, invited seminary professors with expertise in the original languages and the historical context of the Scriptures to share with us, prayed, and waited on the Lord to lead. It was a challenging study, but it deeply enriched everyone involved. One of the principles that guided our study was that we were not looking for uniformity of belief on this topic as we are very aware of the broad landscape of opinions around this topic. We realized that there are well-reasoned, Bible-believing followers of Jesus who have come to differing conclusions on this issue. This meant that we needed to approach this topic with sensitivity and humility. That is what we hope will be shown in the pages of this document.

Our Approach to the Bible

Emmanuel Faith was birthed in 1939 as an independent, Bible-believing church. We are a Protestant church that believes in the authority of the Bible and is committed to following the teachings of Jesus. In our Statement of Faith we assert, "Scripture was without error in the original writings and is completely truthful in all that it addresses; therefore, it is to be believed as God's instruction in all that it affirms. It is to be obeyed as God's command in all that it requires and embraced in all that it promises. The Bible is the only rule for faith and practice." Like our Protestant brothers and sisters before us, we have never been afraid to stand for the truth, even when the prevailing culture had differing opinions and convictions. This is as true today as it ever was, and it is the prayer of the leadership that this will always be true of Emmanuel Faith.

There are a number of subjects about which people who love Jesus and believe in the authority of the Scriptures disagree. Their primary disagreement is often about how the truth of Scripture is to be applied in our day. These are issues that are not central to what it means to be a Christian, but are what some might call "non-essential." One of the principles that we teach in our Membership Class is "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty (or freedom), in all things charity (or love)."¹ The principle is a simple recognition that not all Christian beliefs should be held with the same degree of certainty. To say it another way, there are important doctrinal issues that well-meaning, educated, Bible-believing Christians disagree on, and that is okay.

One of those non-essential issues is the topic of women in church leadership. Over the years, churches have held many strong and varying opinions about the role that women can or cannot play in church leadership, but it has never been treated as a core or "essential" belief of the church. This is reflected in the fact that gender roles have never risen to the level of being included in a central church creed, nor has it ever been included in the Emmanuel Faith Community Church Statement of Faith or the Constitution. While the topic of women in church leadership is "non-essential," we realize that it is of great importance. Not only does it affect over half of the church directly, but it's also an issue that shapes the way we read Scripture and interact with our culture. As we examine the subject of women in church leadership, we recognize that we are not talking primarily about an issue, we are talking about people.

It's important to us that we realize that we are studying and exploring this topic as a family. While we may have differing convictions and conclusions about the role of women in our church, we all believe in the authority of the Bible, want to see Jesus lifted high, and want to see his people using their gifts to build up the body and bring God glory. While this topic has been divisive in some churches, our hope at Emmanuel Faith is that we would be unified through our conviction that Jesus is Lord and our love for one another. We know that every genuine follower of Jesus wants to see women valued and their gifts used to build up the church, some just differ on what that looks like lived out in the church.

The Biblical Case for Women in Church Leadership

It's wise to begin our study at the very beginning of the story as we explore the **big picture of God's vision for human relationships from Genesis to Revelation**. Most biblical discussions of women in leadership focus on a few challenging texts that appear to restrict women's roles in the Church. However, rules of interpretation require that individual texts need to be interpreted in light of the entire Bible and that difficult texts need to be interpreted in light of clearer texts. When we consider all of Scripture, several foundational truths emerge that serve to govern our interpretation and

¹ Early seventeenth century German Lutheran theologian, Rupertus Meldenius.

application of the more isolated and difficult texts. These texts reveal an intentional commitment to mutuality and freedom regarding men's and women's roles in the faith community.

The first foundational truth that is worth noting is that **both men and women are created in the image of God, and though different from one another, they share equally in the divine mandate to exercise dominion over the earth.**

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28)

In the beginning, we see that both men and women carry the image and likeness of God. They are distinct in nature but equal in their representation of the Divine and in their joint responsibility to rule over the rest of creation.

However, this mutually honoring partnership between men and women didn't last long. By Genesis 3, humanity was already questioning God and breaking his laws. Their sin caused a break in four key relationships: with God, with each other, within their own self, and with the creation itself. We won't explore that in detail here, but it's helpful to see how God describes the break in the relationship between the man and the woman. Genesis 3:16 says,

"To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall **rule** over you.'"

In this short timeframe, God explains the reality that women would "ruled over" by men because of the curse of sin. This was a consequence of the fall and not God's intended way for men and women to relate. Sin disrupted the God-intended aspect of complementary relationships and injected the impact and consequence of sin upon the world. God was not saying that this would be a good thing. He was simply saying that it was the new reality. God had designed men and women to rule together, but instead of ruling together, sin causes us to want to rule over each other. In our reading of Scripture, we believe that it's still God's vision that men and women should have dominion together (Genesis 1:28).

Second, we need to notice that **God has been blessing women in spiritual leadership roles all throughout the pages of Scripture.** While Scripture has a clear precedence of male leadership that is reflected in the early church and in the nation of Israel, there are a number of instances in Scripture of strong, godly female leadership as well.

- **Miriam** served in a leadership role as a prophetess alongside her brothers Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15:20).
- **Deborah** was a prophetess who spoke authoritatively for God, and a judge who was both the spiritual and political leader of Israel. She was also married, and God did not seem to need to speak through her husband (Judges 4-5).
- **Huldah** is a prophetess during the reign of young King Josiah. She is introduced when the King orders the following of the High Priest, Hilkiah in 2 Kings 22:13: "Go, inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found." Immediately, the High Priest goes to the most authoritative person he could find, who happens to be Huldah, the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14). God spoke through this woman, not her husband or the other quite famous men who were prophets at the time (Jeremiah or Zephaniah).
- **Disciples:** In Luke 8 we read that many of Jesus' earliest disciples were women and some of them were very active in supporting his ministry financially.
- **Prophetesses:** Philip's four daughters are named prophets and minister to the Apostle Paul, himself (Acts 21:8-9).

- **Phoebe** was a “deacon of the church of Cenchrea” (Romans 16:1), and it was largely held that she would have been the messenger who brought the original copy of the letter that we call “Romans” to the church in Rome. It could even be said that she was the first to teach the book of Romans publicly.²
- **Priscilla** is mentioned six times in the New Testament. This means that she was a very important and influential person in the early church. She was a gifted teacher and one of Paul’s “co-workers in Christ” (Rom. 16:3). She corrected Apollos and taught “him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26).
- **Junia** was called an apostle by Paul. That means that she certainly would have taught and led mixed-gendered groups (Rom. 16:7).
- **Lydia** was a woman of prayer who helped plant the church in Philippi out of her house (Acts 16:13-15).
- **Nympha** was a house church leader in Colossians (Col. 4:15).
- **Euodia** and **Syntyche** were very important leaders in the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:2-4).

In addition to the official roles women held throughout the Scriptures, there are also commands that women were given to teach and proclaim. Most notably, **women were the first people to see the risen Christ, and women were commanded by Jesus to preach to the Apostles about his resurrection.**

John’s account of the resurrection recounts this truth most poignantly. John recorded,

¹⁷ Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” — and that he had said these things to her. (John 20:17-18)

Notice a few things about this text. First, Jesus commands Mary to go and tell what she has seen. Could Jesus have appeared to men if he wanted to? Absolutely. There were two men at the tomb right before he appeared to Mary. His hands were not tied; he is the king of the universe. He chose to appear to Mary and he commissioned her to “announce” to the disciples what she had seen. Mary is the first one to proclaim the truth of the resurrection.

In light of these instances, we are led to consider an important question: is the prominence of male leadership in Scripture descriptive of the cultural norms of Israel and the early church, or is it prescriptive and commanded by God to transcend time and culture? This is a matter that faithful believers have wrestled with for generations, as it touches both on the way we read Scripture, the language chosen by translators, and how we view the role of women in the church today.

Third, we see that at Pentecost, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, **the Holy Spirit fell on both men and women, empowering both genders for ministry and marking the beginning of a new age for God’s people.**

¹⁷ “‘And in the last days it shall be,’ God declares, ‘that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams;

¹⁸ even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’” (Acts 2:17-18)

Men and women, young and old, rich and poor are all indwelt with the same Spirit and sent on the same mission. Men and women were both given the ability through the Spirit to prophecy and speak the words of God. This prophetic role was used both evangelistically as seen in Acts 2, but also in ministry during the worship gatherings (1 Corinthians 11:4-5).

² Scot McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards: A Gospel of Peace in the Midst of Empire* (Baylor University, 2019), 3-5.

Fourth, **both men and women share equally in the spiritual blessings that come through faith in Christ and are therefore on equal footing within the church.** Paul made this point quite poignantly in writing to the church in Galatia. He wrote,

²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:25-29)

Throughout the New Testament, the categories that previously divided and defined people do so no longer. We are first and foremost Jesus' followers and we are made a new creation in him. This passage is primarily about the believer's position in Christ. Ethnicity (Jew or Greek), social status (slave or free), and gender (male or female) have no bearing on whether or not one can become a follower of Jesus. As the saying goes, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." One must also answer the question: Is the ground level within the church? The categories of ethnicity and social status have no bearing on functionality within the church (what positions people can hold). There is positional equality through Christ, but the only distinction we hold onto functionally is regarding men and women.

While Galatians 3:28 alone is not enough to determine whether or not roles within the church should be open to both men and women, it is enough to cause one to wonder why the other two categories have found position *and* functional equality while the category of gender has not. Furthermore, while some have argued that this passage is about salvation alone and not about equality of gifting and service within the church, this argument does not stand against the context of Paul's argument starting in Galatians 2:11. There Paul began a longer defense against Peter for succumbing to cultural Jewish traditions which limited God's plan for the church. Position and functionality were and are tied together.

Fifth, **the gifts of the Spirit are given to both men and women, without distinction.** Listen to the way Paul made this point in writing to the church in Corinth.

⁷But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift...

¹¹And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ... (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11-13)

These gifts are to be used to build up the Body of Christ. Presumably some of that building up would take place when the church gathers for worship and for leading the church. If the gifts are given to "each one," and the gifts are given to "build up the body of Christ," then it stands to reason that if certain people are not able to use their gifts to the fullest of their capacity, the entire church will be worse for it. To say it another way, unused gifts are to the detriment of the whole church body.

Sixth, **we read in Ephesians 5:21 that the church is a community designed for mutual submission.** Paul wrote,

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:18-21)

He goes on to write,

²²Wives, *submit* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)

Most people focus on the command for wives to submit to their husbands but often ignore the command given right before in which we are all called to submit to one another — which is part of the same sentence. In fact, the word "submit" does not appear in verse 22 at all in the original Greek. It would be a mistake to use a specific application (wives submit to your husbands) to eliminate the general command (submit to one another). It would be akin to saying that because husbands are called to love their wives, that wives are not supposed to love their husbands (Ephesians 5:25). I'm not aware of anyone who makes that leap in application. Therefore, we ought to conclude that the church is called

to be a community of mutual submission — which would include men submitting to women. Paul seems to make a special application within the family (a household custom) that only adds to the previous command (submit to one another), it doesn't nullify it.

Finally, **the book of Revelation looks forward to a new creation, in which all of God's people — men and women from all nations — will enjoy fellowship with God and each other and will share equally in God's reign forever and ever.**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. (Revelation 21:1-3)

⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:4-5)

There does not appear to be a hierarchical subjugation of women in heaven. All of the people of God are called his "bride." The beginning *and* end of the story of Scripture have men and women serving side-by-side without any sort of hierarchical divide.

To be clear, these texts do not address specific applications of women in leadership roles within the church, but they do set forth a trajectory and universal truths that reveal God's intentions for his creation as a whole and his church uniquely. It's important to keep these universal truths in mind because challenging texts and passages require discernment in deciding between their universal or limited applicability, and these truths should help guide our decisions.

For example, for centuries many Bible-believing Christians defended slavery and used the Bible to do so. There is no passage in the Bible that outrightly condemns slavery, however, when we take into account the whole counsel of God, the redemptive story, and the trajectory set forth in Scripture, we have a clear mandate to value all people and therefore war against slavery. We believe that God never intended the ownership nor subjugation of one human to another even though the Bible never outrightly condemns such action.³

Similarly, the foundational texts that affirm the equality of men and women regarding nature, status, gifting, and calling, must guide our interpretation and application of difficult and culturally conditioned texts that seem to restrict women's freedom to serve and lead. These texts help us become more honest and accurate interpreters of passages of Scripture that suggest a divergent view.

Cultural Context

Before we dive into the applicable texts, it's important to note all Scripture was given within a cultural context. This makes modern interpretation and application challenging, but it also means that it is impossible to ignore cultural issues. In fact, some of the commands given vary based on context — even within the New Testament.

For example, should a follower of Jesus eat food sacrificed to idols? That was a very important question for first-century Christians. Listen to the way the Jerusalem Council directs the church,

"... that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." (Acts 15:29)

³ See Strauss, Mark. *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times*. Section on Tracing the Trajectory of the Spirit, pg. 217 for a great explanation of this principle.

It's pretty clear, do not eat food sacrificed to idols. However, when he was writing to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote,

Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. (1 Corinthians 8:4-13)

For the larger context read verses 4-13 and you'll see that Paul claims this is an area of freedom for Jesus' followers and that they should make their decision about eating food sacrificed to idols based on their own convictions and their commitment to making sure no one stumbles because of their freedom. The question remains, is eating food sacrificed to idols wrong? It depends on the cultural context.

This is an example of the fact that clearly interpreting Scripture is not an easy task. There are many strong followers of Jesus who all take the Bible seriously and fall on different sides of these important issues.

Men and Women in the Ancient World

Both the Old and New Testaments were written in overtly patriarchal cultures. Generally speaking, women did not have the same legal status as men, were less educated than men, and were often treated as though they were the property of their fathers or their husbands. Men regularly married much younger women, and women lacked worldly experiences outside the home. In religious settings, women were not considered worthy of a rabbi's instruction, nor were they granted any leadership opportunities. Because of their lack of spiritual instruction, and their limited leadership experiences, the vast majority of women were not qualified to be teachers or leaders.

Ephesus had a different subculture because of the influence of the female-led Temple of Artemis. In Ephesus, women seemed to have risen to more of a place of prominence because of the way the worship of Artemis shaped the culture. Women in Ephesus experienced more prominence and freedom despite their lack of education and exposure to leadership in comparison to men.

In light of the greater realities of the first-century Greco-Roman world, placing women in positions of authoritative teaching or leadership over men would generally have been counter-cultural. Dr. Mark Strauss summarized the cultural context well when he wrote, "Male leadership was not so much mandated as assumed."⁴ People who have lived or ministered in a strongly patriarchal culture will recognize that such a move would tear the social and spiritual fabric of the community. It would have been a scandal in the community and a stumbling block to the advance of the gospel. In his pastoral letters, Paul exhorts men and women to respect the cultural norms of the day so "that the word of God may not be reviled" and "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior" (Titus 2:1-10).

The concern for the reputation of the gospel may help to explain why Jesus and the apostles consistently advanced women's rights and opportunities but stopped short of a "breaking point" that the culture simply could not bear. For instance, Jesus radically advances women's spiritual opportunities and considers women his disciples (Luke 8:1-3), but he stops short of naming a woman as one of the Twelve Apostles. It's possible that Jesus refrained from having female apostles because it would have been scandalous for women to be traveling with men to whom they were not married. There are layers of culture underneath the discussion of men and women serving together in the first century, but Jesus and the church stretch them all. While there were no women Apostles among the twelve, the way women served and led in the early church was revolutionary.

In the contemporary Western world, the cultural factors that once hindered women from authoritative and leading roles are no longer relevant. Women have equal status, equal rights, and increasingly equal

⁴ Strauss, Mark. *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times*. 238.

opportunities in every sector of society; the church often being one final exception. Women are as well-educated and as wise as men. Women are leaders in government, business, and society at large. In light of these contemporary realities, the restrictions placed on women in the church not only deprive the church of their full contribution to the ministry but often become a stumbling block to people outside the household of faith. In essence, these limitations serve the exact opposite purpose for which they were intended in the first century.

Therefore, to properly understand and apply Scripture, we must do our best to recognize cultural factors that shaped the text, identify timeless principles that reflect God's vision for humankind to advance the gospel in culturally appropriate ways, and come up with a biblically sound application for our cultural moment.

The Spectrum of Views

When it comes to the stances that churches and individuals hold in regard to women in church leadership, there are four widely-held categories people fall within. These categories are not precisely defined and have a lot of overlap, but this overview will be helpful as we define our terms for this paper.

The first is **patriarchy**. Doug Wilson wrote about patriarchy and described it stating, "Patriarchy simply means 'father rule,' and so it follows that every biblical Christian holds to patriarchy. The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23), and fathers have the central responsibility to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Children are required to obey their parents (both of them), and since the wife is to follow the lead of her husband in all things (Ephesians 5:24), this means that the father is responsible to provide for and protect his family. Father rule. That's the good part."⁵ The system extends beyond male leadership into male headship, control, and at times, dominance well beyond the family context. This category often subjugates women and leads to an unhealthy environment where the male head assumes unilateral power. In addition, patriarchy views male authority as God's design for all areas of leadership. There is no space for a differentiated and nuanced understanding of different realms of authority (in the home, government, church, etc.) that may place men and women in different positions in different situations.

The second view is that of **complementarianism**. Complementarians essentially believe that God created males and females equal in essence but for differing functions. John Piper summarized this view by stating, "We believe that when it comes to human sexuality, the greatest display of God's glory, the greatest joy of human relationships, and the greatest fruitfulness in ministry come about when the deep differences between men and women are embraced and celebrated as complements to each other. They complete and beautify each other."⁶ But in this viewpoint, the functional outplaying of Piper's definition extends beyond simply "complementing one another" in life and marriage, and extends to limiting roles women can play. Most complementarians would posit that a woman is prohibited from filling the role of preacher and elder because those are leadership roles designed to be filled by men.

It can be helpful to view the complementarian position into two subcategories — **traditional complementarianism and mutualist complementarianism**. A traditional complementarian is concerned with what women are prohibited from doing and how they interact with men in church and life. Interestingly enough, the traditional complementarian view doesn't appear to have any restrictions for the areas men serve within the church — which seems to defeat the purpose of the system being "complementary to each other."

⁵ <https://dougwils.com/books-and-culture/s7-engaging-the-culture/patriarchy-vision-forum-and-all-the-rest-of-it.html>.

⁶ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-created-man-male-and-female>

By way of contrast, mutualist complementarians agree that men and women are created uniquely and each for a God-given purpose, but assert that this purpose extends to a complementary exercising of roles within the church. It would be possible to have a complementary pulpit — one where men preach like men and women preach like women; each bringing their full God-given gifts to bear on the community of faith. It would be possible to have a complementary kids ministry where men and women are teaching the children about Jesus. It would be possible to have a complementary leadership team where men and women complement each other and contribute unique talents and encouragement as together they lead the church. Given the differences in the ways that God designed men and women, the church is incomplete if they do not complement each other. The approach to ministry is shaped by a desire for there to be mutuality among men and women.

The third category is **egalitarianism**. Rebecca Groothuis summarized this view by writing, “Evangelical egalitarianism, or biblical equality, refers to the biblically-based belief that gender, in and of itself, neither privileges nor curtails a believer’s gifting or calling to any ministry in the church or home. In particular, the exercise of spiritual authority, as biblically defined, is deemed as much a female believer’s privilege and responsibility as it is a male believer’s.”⁷ Strictly following Groothuis’ definition, there would be little difference between it and the view of mutual complementarianism. However, in some cases, egalitarianism pushes further and blurs the lines between male and female — at times causing each to lose their distinctiveness. Equality in some cases becomes uniformity, which can lose the beauty of the distinctions between male and female.

The final category is that of **feminism**. Secular feminism found its place in society at large in the 1960s, but biblical feminism has only found its place in the church in the last few decades. Gretchen Hull summarized biblical feminism by writing, “Biblical feminists want to explore their convictions about equality of women based on biblical teachings, to implement their findings according to biblical guidelines, and to use biblical methods of conflict resolution. Therefore it will be within scriptural parameters that biblical feminists promote a climate in which women are free to act as equal human beings — and where Christian women can enter into their full inheritance as equal children of God.”⁸ While there are many similarities to that of egalitarianism, the main distinction is that biblical feminism is concerned primarily with the woman’s place in the church while egalitarians remain focused on all people.

There are of course nuances within each position and differing definitions in various circles. Admittedly, an absolute definition of each is hard to pin down. The above is given as a framework to think within, not categories to be baptized as inerrant. As such, it’s wise to withhold a defense or challenge of any categorical allegiance until the end of our study.

Responding to the Prohibitive Passages

Several main texts have shaped the traditional complementarian stance on women in leadership. Let’s turn our attention to those passages of Scripture.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

First, 1 Timothy 2:11-12. This passage is most pertinent to Emmanuel Faith because our current position paper is written based on a study of this text. The whole section reads,

⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with

⁷ As quoted by Douglas Groothuis in <https://www.douglasgroothuis.com/post/why-i-am-an-evangelical-egalitarian>

⁸ <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/biblical-feminism/>

modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness — with good works.

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

This text is the primary passage that has been used in defense of the traditional complementarian view that prevents women from preaching during public worship gatherings and carrying the title of pastor.

While Dr. Richard Strauss⁹ held the position that only males should preach and teach, he also realized that both sides of the debate had Scriptural backing. In a sermon on 1 Corinthians 11, he said,

“Now I know you are eagerly looking forward to what I am going to say about this verse, but if you came expecting a dogmatic declaration as to its meaning, you will go away disappointed. This is one subject about which there is a great deal of disagreement, and both sides have good scriptural evidence.”¹⁰

Dr. Strauss was and is correct. There is a lot of disagreement and discussion about this passage and it’s unwise to hold to any stance dogmatically because there is good scriptural evidence on both sides. That’s good for us to keep in mind as we study this passage.

Let’s begin our study by understanding the way traditional complementarians interpret and apply 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Paul wrote,

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. (1 Timothy 2:11-12)

Two primary conclusions about polity and praxis are drawn from this passage. Paul begins this section with the instruction for women to “learn quietly with all submissiveness.” According to John MacArthur, what Paul means by “women learn quietly” is that,

“Women are to be learners rather than teachers during public worship.”¹¹

He rightly points out that this was a change for those who came from a Jewish background. While women weren’t barred from attending synagogue, they certainly weren’t encouraged to learn. Traditional complementarians see “learn quietly and all submissiveness” as being set in contrast to teaching. MacArthur follows this line of reasoning as he interprets “keep quiet” at the end of verse 12 to be a reaffirmation that women are not to teach. He says that,

“Women are to demonstrate subjection by not usurping the authority of the elder or preacher.

That is true not because women are in any sense inferior to men, but because God’s law commands it (1 Corinthians 14:34), in line with His design for the weaker vessels.”¹²

MacArthur grounds his understanding of role differentiation in the distinct nature and calling that men and women have been given by God. **The first conclusion typically drawn by traditional complementarians is that women are prohibited from teaching when the church is gathered for worship because teaching is seen as an authoritative act and women are not to exercise authority over men.**

Since women are told to remain silent and not permitted to exercise authority over a man, MacArthur and some others posit that women are to be subordinate to men in the affairs of the local church when gathered for worship; even in speaking, praying, or imparting some thought from the Word. MacArthur states,

“This does not entirely rule out women teaching. Priscilla and Aquilla both instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26), but in private and not in the worship of the church. And women can and must teach

⁹ Much loved and respected Emmanuel Faith Community Church pastor from 1972-1993.

¹⁰ Richard Strauss wrote his opinion on this difficult passage of 1 Tim. 2:12 as he taught through 1 Timothy back on 2/8/76. You can find the audio message online at <http://spiritualgold.org/soundfiles/1TM-3B.mp3>.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 82.

¹² *Ibid*, 86.

other women (Titus 2:3-4). Nor does it mean women cannot pray, merely that they are not to lead prayers during the public worship of the church."¹³

Other traditional complementarians would suggest that MacArthur's conclusion surpasses that of the text and actually contradicts what Paul writes the church in Corinth when he states,

⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is the same as having her head shaved. (1 Corinthians 11:5, NIV)

They point out that both men and women were praying and prophesying when the church was gathered for worship. The extent of limitation for women within the worshiping community is not widely agreed upon by traditional complementarians, but what is agreed on is that women are prohibited from teaching when the church is gathered.

Second, traditional complementarians posit that since "a woman is not to exercise authority over the man," women are not to have leadership roles within the church where they have authority or dominion over men. Douglas Moo captures this well when he states,

"Clearly then, Paul's prohibition of women's having authority over a man would exclude a woman from becoming an elder in the way this office is described in the pastoral epistles. By extension, then, women would be debarred from occupying whatever position in a given local church would be equivalent to the pastoral epistles' governing elder (many churches, for instance, call these people deacons)."¹⁴

For traditional complementarians, this prevents a woman from serving as an elder or a pastor. This is the **second main prohibition for women found in 1 Timothy 2:12; a woman is prevented from holding any role where she has authority over men**. Some traditional complementarians would suggest that the authority Paul is addressing here is elder-level or governing authority.

In summary of the conclusions drawn thus far, according to traditional complementarians, based on 1 Timothy 2:11-12, women are prohibited from:

1. Teaching with authority when the church is gathered for worship.
2. Holding a role where she has authority ("elder-level" or governing authority) over men.

From this point through the end of the chapter, Paul gives his reasoning for the instruction he's giving. Traditional complementarians will point out that **Paul grounds his argument in the order of creation**, therefore it's to be a mandate that is given for **all churches and for all time**. Listen to his statement again,

¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:13-14)

Some mutual complementarians and egalitarians suggest that women's subjugation to men is a result of the Fall, but MacArthur points out that Paul's point here is that,

"Woman's subordinate role is not established in the Fall, but in divine order or original creation... God made woman after man to be his suitable helper (Gen. 2:18). The priority of man's role is obvious."¹⁵

Man is understood to be the head of the woman and so for a woman to teach and have authority over a man would be to violate the order of creation and the principle of headship.

However, one must ask what the connection is between man being created first and the woman being deceived. MacArthur argues that the second part of the statement "**the woman was deceived**" is a result of her not honoring the order of creation. He says,

"Eve was not suited by nature to assume the position of ultimate responsibility. When she stepped out from under the protection and leadership of Adam, she was highly vulnerable and fell. Of course, Adam violated his leadership role and followed Eve (though it was not he who

¹³ Ibid, 87.

¹⁴ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 190.

¹⁵ MacArthur, 88.

was deceived), the perversion of God's order was complete. The Fall resulted, then, not simply from disobedience to God's command, but from violating God's appointed roles for the sexes."¹⁶ For MacArthur and other traditional complementarians, the error Paul is addressing is that Adam failed in his leadership role and Eve failed to follow Adam which resulted in Eve being deceived.

I think Wayne Grudem's summary of this position honors the reasoning that follows if verses 13 and 14 are interpreted in a connected manner. He wrote,

"Paul is saying, therefore, that **women should not teach or have authority over men in the congregation of God's people for two reasons:** (1) God gave Adam a leadership role when he created him first and Eve second (v. 13), and (2) God gave men, in general, a disposition that is better suited to teaching and governing in the church, a disposition that inclines more to the rational, logical analysis of doctrine and a desire to protect the doctrinal purity of the church, and God gave women, in general, a disposition that inclines more toward a relational, nurturing emphasis that places a higher value on unity and community in the church (v. 14). Both emphases are needed, of course, and both men and women have some measure of both tendencies. But Paul understands the kinder, gentler, more relational nature of women (in general) as something that made Eve less inclined to oppose the deceptive serpent and more inclined to accept his words as something helpful and true."¹⁷

Grudem asserts what many fall short of saying. The first part of Paul's argument is that men are created first and that means they are to be the leaders (v. 13), and male leadership is in place because women are more susceptible to deception (v. 14).

Others are not willing to go as far as Grudem on this point. They suggest that verse 13 stands on its own and is not an introduction to verse 14. Douglas Moo summarizes this interpretation when he writes,

"After all, does Paul care only that the women not teach men false doctrines? Does he not care that they not teach them to other women? More likely, then, verse 14, in conjunction with verse 13, is intended to remind the women at Ephesus that Eve was deceived by the serpent in the Garden (Genesis 3:13) precisely in taking the initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her. In the same way, if the women at the church in Ephesus proclaim their independence from the men of the church, refusing to learn 'in quietness and full submission' (verse 11), seeking roles that have been given to men in the church (verse 12), they will make the same mistake Eve made and bring similar disaster on themselves and the church. This explanation of the function of verse 14 in the paragraph fits what we know to be the general insubordination of some of the women at Ephesus and explains Paul's emphasis in the verse better than any alternative."¹⁸

The distinction is that, instead of making a sweeping generalization like Grudem does, Moo suggests that what happened in the garden with the subversion of roles and headship, is what was happening in Ephesus. In the garden, that subversion of roles led to Eve's deception and the fall. **He concludes that male leadership is to remain in place so as to prevent that same kind of deception from entering the church.**

Paul went on to write,

¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:15)

While there is little consensus regarding what this means, there seems to be agreement among traditional complementarians that Paul is reinforcing the distinct roles he has given men and women in creation; after all, that was the line of reasoning he began in verse 13. Wayne Grudem writes,

"The general force of the sentence is clear, although people differ about the details... The phrase 'through childbearing' is probably best understood as an example of being obedient to God's

¹⁶ Ibid, 88-89.

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 882ff.

¹⁸ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 190.

calling on one's life. Women are not to teach or govern the church, but God has given them a special responsibility, the awesome responsibility of bearing and raising children."¹⁹

If one follows the line of reasoning to the end of verse 15, Paul seems to be making a point about each gender's God-given roles. The man was created first and was designed to lead. The woman was created second and is designed to "bear and raise children." Certainly, the raising of children is no secondary role. After all, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

Some traditional complementarians don't see this as a blanket statement that necessitates being true in every situation. They will point out that there have always been single women and women who are not able to have children within the church. They will also acknowledge that women are permitted to teach other women (Titus 2:3-5) and that both men and women are designed to lead both inside and outside of the church. They posit that Paul is addressing a perversion of God's ordained roles for men and women which is made clear by his reference to childbirth in verse 15. His point is that God's ordained order is that men teach and lead and women focus on the home.

In summary, according to traditional complementarians, Paul's instruction to the church, both in Ephesus and for every church regardless of time and place, is that women are prohibited from:

1. Teaching with authority when the church is gathered for worship. (v. 12)
2. Holding a role where she has authority (elder-level or governing authority) over men. (v. 12)

The reasoning Paul gives is that:

1. Men were created first which *implies* their leadership and headship. (v. 13)
2. Subversion of God-ordained roles and male headship makes the church more susceptible to deception. (v. 14)
3. God's ordained order is that men teach and lead, and women focus on the home. (v. 15)

Traditional complementarians often hold the conviction that a deviation from this interpretation would lead to a diversion from the truth of Scripture. In a 2006 interview, Wayne Grudem summarized the fear of many. He stated,

"A woman who serves as a pastor, preaching to both men and women, is disobeying the word of God. There are always negative consequences to that. First, there will be an erosion of trust in the Bible and obedience to the Bible. Also, there will be an erosion of male leadership in the family because the modeling of female leadership in the pastorate will be reflected in a lessening of male leadership in the home. There will be a resulting increase in gender identity confusion among boys and girls growing up in the church. I also think that anyone who lives in a pattern of constant disobedience to the word of God — if a woman does this, is opening herself up to the danger of the withdrawal of God's hand of protection and blessing on her life."²⁰

Grudem accurately highlights the convictions that many traditional complementarians hold. First, the Scripture is clear that women should not be pastors, nor should they preach. Second, that if churches go against God's ordained and explicitly stated design they will experience the withdrawal of God's blessing. Third, allowing females to lead within the church will threaten men's ability to lead in the church and at home.

Emmanuel Faith's historic conviction and praxis could be summarized as a traditional complementarian, falling in line with the reasoning and interpretation outlined above. However, it's worth examining both the conclusions drawn and the reasoning in light of the passage itself, the book of 1 Timothy as a whole, and the rest of the Scripture. We believe that there is good reason within the passage and Scripture as a whole to draw a different conclusion about what Paul is teaching and how it should be applied to the church today.

¹⁹ Grudem, 882ff.

²⁰ <https://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/christianity/2006/10/women-pastors-not-the-path-to-blessing.aspx>

The first conclusion drawn by traditional complementarians is that women are prohibited from teaching with authority when the church is gathered for worship (v. 12). **First, one must ask why there aren't more prohibitions drawn from this passage.** There are four imperatives in 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

1. That men pray with hands lifted high (v. 8).
2. That women adorn themselves in respectable apparel which is defined as not having braided hair, gold, pearls, or wearing expensive clothes (v. 9).
3. That women learn in quietness and submission (v. 11).
4. That women do not teach or exercise authority over a man (v. 12)

There are four commands given, but traditional complementarians only apply two — that a woman learns in quietness and submission and that they refrain from teaching and exercising authority over men. From a hermeneutical standpoint, it's inconsistent to apply two commands directly and universally, but to fail to apply the same logic to the other two commands in the same passage. Why would one insist on applying the portion about women teaching, but largely ignore the verse that commands a man to pray with his hands in the air? Why insist on women being quiet, but ignore the passage that prevents a woman from wearing gold jewelry and having braided hair (1 Tim. 2:8-9)?

A consistent hermeneutic ought to apply all the commands in the passage directly since it insists on applying two of them directly. If we don't permit women to teach based on the prohibition found in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, we should also be so bold as to say that women cannot wear gold jewelry or have braided hair. We also ought to require men to pray with their hands in the air. The fact that all of those commands are in the same passage, but only two of them are applied directly, suggests an interpretive bias that creates an inconsistent hermeneutic.

Secondly, if one is going to make the claim that women are prevented from teaching with authority when the church is gathered for worship, then the words "teach" and "authority" should be examined in great detail to see what they mean. Let's look at the word "teach" first and examine the way it was used throughout the New Testament. Paul wrote,

¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. (1 Timothy 2:12)

The Greek word translate "to teach" in 1 Timothy 2:12 is *didaskó*.²¹ The root word is used 96 times in the New Testament. However, **this is the only occasion where teaching is limited to being a role only men can fulfill.** The only other times the word *didaskó* is limited is when teaching false doctrine is being prevented (Matthew 15:9; Romans 2:21; etc.). There is not one other instance in Scripture in which gender is given as a reason for someone not teaching.²²

In fact, the overwhelming evidence is that the task of teaching is not limited to men, it's given to everyone in the church. All disciples are commanded to teach (*didaskó*), Jesus made that clear in his Great Commission. He said,

¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching (*didaskó*) them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

Unless we say that the Great Commission is limited to only men, we'd have to agree that women are called and commissioned by Jesus to teach people to obey all that Jesus has commanded.

It appears that the early church took this directive seriously because, on two different occasions, Paul instructed everyone in the church to teach. In Colossians 3:16 he wrote,

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching (*didaskó*) and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

²¹ For a complete word study on *didaskó* in the New Testament, click here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1dcXBsdShzATBDW5HT48RNDAAeWE3UmN-2EPVgOEj3RMw/edit?usp=sharing>

²² See a comprehensive word study at:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1dcXBsdShzATBDW5HT48RNDAAeWE3UmN-2EPVgOEj3RMw/edit?usp=sharing>

As a community of faith, we teach and admonish one another. In addition, he wrote to the church in Corinth and said,

²⁶ What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson (*didaché*), a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

Paul claims that “each one has a lesson” and he uses the same root for teaching. Each one would include both men and women in a context where Paul is writing about the public worship gathering.

And in Hebrews, the church is rebuked because only a few of them have become teachers. The author wrote,

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers (*didaskó*), you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food... (Hebrews 5:12)

The author of Hebrews doesn't limit his desire for more male teachers, he's writing to the whole church. It appears that the expectation was that some or many of the people within the church would become teachers.

In each of these cases, the same root Greek word Paul used in 1 Timothy 2:12 is used (*didaskó*). In 1 Timothy 2:12, we see Paul limiting the teaching that women can do and in Colossians 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 14 we see Paul commanding that everyone is to teach; which certainly implies that women are teaching men. It's challenging to know how to resolve the tension created by these passages that seem on the surface to contradict one another.

Emmanuel Faith has historically stated that women can teach men in certain contexts, but not in others. For years, women have been allowed to teach in mixed-gendered Adult Bible Fellowship Classes, they've been permitted to teach seminars, and both Joni Eareckson (late 1980s) and Elizabeth Elliot (1991) were allowed to teach in the Sunday night church services. However, women have been prohibited from teaching from the pulpit during the main worship gathering because that form of teaching was seen as teaching in a way that “exercises authority.” That interpretation goes beyond what's stated in 1 Timothy and cannot be found elsewhere in Scripture. We fail to see how the conclusion that some teaching is authoritative and other teaching is not is drawn from any biblical text. Even if we deduce that the restriction placed on women in 1 Timothy 2:12 is given for the public worship gathering, there is no reason to restrict the command given in Colossians 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 14:26 from being followed within the context of public worship, especially since the instruction in 1 Corinthians 14 is given in the context of public worship. If Paul grounded his reasoning for restricting women from teaching men in the order of creation, why would that restriction only apply only to worship services?

It seems best to view 1 Timothy 2 as a specific situation in Ephesus that Paul was addressing. His statement in 1 Timothy wouldn't override the general commands he and others gave in other passages — mainly that all would teach. It seems that the weight of Scripture as a whole calls all believers to teach, and therefore, there should not be gender restrictions made on the type or place of that teaching.

We've already begun to address the second word we must explore, **authority**. Paul stated,

¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise *authority* over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. (1 Timothy 2:12)

Many churches apply the command and enforce the prohibition preventing women from teaching, but it is generally assumed that a man can teach in an authoritative way. Why? The text does not say that, it only says that women cannot teach and exercise authority. It's unwise to assume that a negative implies a positive. That would be akin to a parent telling their daughter she cannot steal the car and drive it 100 mph down the road and their son hearing the conversation and assuming that he can. That's essentially what we do when we read 1 Timothy as allowing men to teach authoritatively.

Good hermeneutics would suggest that, if indeed God has commanded men to teach in an "authoritative" manner, there would be a command to do so; or, in the least, we should see biblical examples of men serving in this way. However, when one attempts to find examples of men exercising this type of "teaching authority," we are left wanting. There is not a single passage that exists to back up such a claim.

A word study is important in attempting to discern what Paul is teaching. **The Greek word translated "authoritative" is "authentein" and this is the only place in Scripture this word is used.** The word is defined as "to domineer, govern, have mastery over."²³ In fact, the word could literally mean "one who with his own hand kills either others or himself."²⁴ Some suggest there was some form of abusive teaching and power-mongering taking place by the women in Ephesus. However, because *authenteo* is only used in this instance in the Bible, it's hard to get a sense of the way the word is being used and why it is being used in this instance. MacArthur and Grudem have argued that the word is not being used in a negative manner, and others strongly state that the word was typically used in a negative way in ancient Greek literature. It's not entirely possible to know what Paul had in mind.

To be as generous to the people who hold to a view that women cannot teach authoritatively, but men can, we included the Greek word *exousia* in our study. This is essentially our way of taking the question about whether *authentein* is being used positively or negatively out of the equation. It's the other Greek word that is often translated as "authority" and it's used about 100 times in the New Testament. It's not the same word and it has a substantially less aggressive implication, but exploring "authoritative teaching" in the New Testament ought to include more than one passage. As we read through the New Testament, we see that **Jesus is the only person to ever teach with *exousia*** (Mk 1:22, 27; Mt 7:29; Luke 4:32). Paul didn't teach with authority, the disciples didn't teach with authority, and the elders were not commissioned or commanded to teach (or govern) with authority. Jesus is the only person said to have taught with authority.

Interestingly, Paul claimed to have authority on two occasions. In 1 Corinthians 10:8, he wrote,

⁸ For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed.

And in 2 Corinthians 13:10 he wrote,

¹⁰ For this reason I write these things while I am away from you, that when I come I may not have to be severe in my use of the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Both times Paul claims to have authority (*exousia*), it is for the purpose of building people up; not for teaching. Either of these cases would have been an opportunity to state he had authority to teach, but he did not.

Therefore, it's best to conclude that 1 Timothy 2:12 prevents a woman from teaching with "authority," but it doesn't give anyone the right to teach "authoritatively." Jesus is the only person who teaches with authority in the New Testament. In fact, there is not one passage in the New Testament that allows one person to have authority over another person. Every Jesus follower is given authority over demons (Mt. 10:1), but not over other people. Paul is not preventing women from preaching or teaching in general, he's preventing them from teaching in an "authenteo" manner — which must have been something they were doing at the church in Ephesus. We read Paul as saying that **a woman is allowed to teach in a non-authoritative way — the same exact way a man is allowed to teach.** Women are to learn in quietness (1 Timothy 2:11), the same way anyone else would learn. In Ephesus, these guidelines were being violated by women being domineering and seeking to dominate, therefore Paul addressed it in his letter to Timothy.

²³ <https://biblehub.com/greek/831.htm>

²⁴ Ibid.

This makes sense because **authority comes from alignment with the truth and intent of Scripture. Scripture's authority is not determined by the person teaching or the place and occasion of the teaching. Its authority is self-determined.** Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:11-12 in a way that limits a woman's ability to preach actually devalues and displaces Scripture from its rightful place in a worshipping community. In essence, when we say a woman cannot teach authoritatively over a man, what we're saying is that the teacher is the locus of authority rather than the Scriptures themselves. An example might be helpful. If a man stood up in the pulpit on a Sunday morning and taught that Jesus was *not* the Son of God, we would not view his teaching as authoritative. Why? Because it does not align with the truth of Scripture. However, if a woman got up in a Bible Study and taught that Jesus was the Son of God and that we should surrender our whole life to him, we would view that as authoritative. Why? Because what makes something authoritative is not the gender or a person giving a message or the setting in which the message is given; what makes something authoritative is its alignment with the truth of the Scriptures.

When we call some teaching authoritative because of who's teaching and the setting the teaching is given in and call other teaching non-authoritative because of the same factors, we diminish the place of the Bible in the community of faith and elevate the teacher or style of gathering over the Bible. However, the locus of authority is Scripture, not a teacher. The view of 1 Timothy 2:12 which suggests that a woman cannot teach authoritatively, but posits that a man can, goes to further reinforce the "celebrity pastor" mentality that we have seen negatively affect the church in America. If our goal is to point people to Jesus and not to any person, we should maintain that the Scriptures are our authority, not a teacher.

As one seeks to understand why Paul made a prohibition against women teaching and exercising authority, **the context of first-century Ephesus can aid in our understanding of what Paul is addressing.** The cult of Artemis had a strong influence in Ephesus and it's likely that influence was creeping into the church through women who were coming to faith in Jesus. Part of the culture of the cult of Artemis was that women boisterously flaunted their superiority in power, beauty, and wealth as a demonstration of their religious fervor. Notice how Paul addressed the issues of wealth and beauty in verses 9-10.²⁵ Linda Belleville writes,

"A reasonable reconstruction of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, would read as follows: 'The women at Ephesus (perhaps encouraged by the false teachers) were trying to gain an advantage over the men in the congregation by teaching in a domineering fashion. The men in response became angry and disputed what the women were doing.'"²⁶

This interpretation fits the broader context and grammatical flow. Paul is forbidding a domineering form of teaching aimed at superiority, not the teaching of women in general.

The flow of Paul's argument in the letter seems to make this clear. He teaches in 1 Timothy 2:2b-4 that for the testimony of the gospel in the community,

"All people (must) live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

After applying this to men in verse 8 through a call to unity and holiness through the command to "pray with holy hands lifted," Paul applies that same logic to the women of the church. The focus is on living in a way that is an accurate reflection of the gospel — through their dress and conduct.

In direct contrast to the assertiveness of the cult of Artemis, and in order to preserve the reputation of the gospel, Christian women should be modest and show godliness in good works (vv. 9-10). This would have been very different from the prevailing culture in Ephesus at the time. In addition, women's proper stance for learning is also to sit in quietness and respect for the teacher (1 Timothy 2:11). This

²⁵ See *Why Women Must Learn in Quietness and Submission: Xenophon of Ephesus and 1 Timothy 2* (Gary Hoag) for more information on the cultural context of Ephesus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsyQlaC0btY>

²⁶ <https://womeninthechurch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Linda-Belleville-on-1-Timothy-2-vv-8-to-15.pdf>

quiet and submissive posture communicated proper respect to the teachers, created an undistracted environment for learning, and set a standard for unbelievers who are observing Christian behavior. Challenging women to “learn in quietness” was nothing different from what would be expected of men who were learning. Women were to learn in quietness and submission — the same way the men were learning, but evidently not the way some women were acting within the church.

This interpretation seems to fit very well into the overall theme of the letter. 1 Timothy is a letter from the Apostle Paul to his trusted protégé, instructing him to stay in the city of Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3) because of the prevalence of false teaching, which is the primary concern, not only of the passage but the letter as a whole. Paul stated his purpose for the letter when he wrote,

³ As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. (1 Timothy 1:3-4)

While we don't know the exact nature of the false teaching in its entirety, it appears likely that some men and women were teaching heresy and listening to false prophets (1 Timothy 1:6-7, 20, 5:13-15; 2 Timothy 3:6-7).

Paul addressed two men by name in chapter one, and then he moved on to address the women in chapter two. This is an important note because traditional complementarians suggest that part of Paul's reasoning for preventing women from preaching is that women are more susceptible to deception (See Grudem's statement above). That's the conclusion drawn from 1 Timothy 2:14 which states,

“... Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived ...” (1 Timothy 2:14)

However, Paul named two men in Chapter 1 who had been deceived and walked away from their faith. He wrote,

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. (1 Timothy 1:18-20)

In light of the fact that two prominent men were named in chapter one as people who had rejected their faith, one should at least question if one chapter later Paul draws the conclusion that women cannot teach because they are more easily deceived. Indeed, it would be appropriate to explore other ways of interpreting what he intends when he points out “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived.”

So, as one examines both the conclusions drawn by traditional complementarians from this passage, we see that neither of them holds up to the scrutiny of being examined against the backdrop of the rest of Scripture. **First**, the statement that women are prohibited from teaching with authority when the church is gathered for worship is contrasted with the command that every believer is to show up to church with a teaching (1 Corinthians 14:26). Additionally, we don't see gender being a limiting factor in any other passage in Scripture. The **second** conclusion was that women are prohibited from holding a role where she has authority (elder-level or governing authority) over men (v. 12). As we examined the entirety of Scripture, we don't see Paul giving anyone the kind of authority he prevents women from having. It appears that Paul addressed a situation in the church in Ephesus where women were teaching and exercising authority that was out of alignment with the way of Jesus.

Now that we have explored the conclusions drawn by traditional complementarians and offered different conclusions, we turn our attention to the reasoning that was given. Admittedly, the way one interprets Paul's reasoning flows directly from the way one interprets the prohibitions he made. Remember, the reasoning interpreted of 1 Timothy 2:13-15 by traditional complementarians was:

1. Men were created first which implies their leadership and headship. (v. 13)
2. Subversion of God-ordained roles and male headship makes the church more susceptible to deception. (v. 14)

3. God's ordained order is that men teach and lead and women focus on the home. (v. 15)
In light of arriving at a different conclusion about what Paul is commanding, how might one interpret verses 13-15 in a different manner?

Let's begin with 1 Timothy 2:13 which states,

¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve...

As previously stated, traditional complementarians typically point to 1 Timothy 2:13-14 as evidence that Paul intends his prohibition to be universal rather than cultural. They point out that Paul makes his argument on the grounds of creation and God's created order. However, there are a few issues with that reasoning that are worth considering.

First, traditional complementarians draw the conclusion that Paul's reference to man being created first is a statement about male leadership and headship. However, that is not stated in 1 Timothy 2:13. Paul could have used this as a place to reinforce a theology of headship (see Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11), but he did not. One has to make an interpretive leap to make that point. We read earlier that John MacArthur cited Genesis 2:18 as a cross-reference to drive home the idea of male headship and leadership. The passage reads,

¹⁸ The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a *helper* suitable for him."
(Genesis 2:18)

Now, before too many conclusions about Eve being referred to as a "helper," we need to recognize that the word translated as "helper" is the Hebrew word "*ezer*." It is used at least 21 times in scripture — two times it's a reference to women, three times to other people, and 16 times it's a reference to God. It's always and only used in the Old Testament in the context of vitally important and powerful acts of rescue and support. *Ezer* describes aspects of God's character: he is our strength, our rescuer, our protector, and our help! And *ezer* was the Holy Spirit's choice of word to describe the first woman. Eve was someone who would provide valuable and vital strength to Adam, not someone who was subservient to him.

Some will point to Genesis 3:16 as further proof that man was designed to be the head over woman. The passage reads,

¹⁶ To the woman he said,
"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.
Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

However, that line of reasoning distorts the narrative of Genesis 1-3. Walter Kaiser wrote about this error, stating,

"A restricted status for woman has been traditionally grounded in the account of the Fall (Genesis 3) in both Jewish and Christian thought and practice. But it is clear from the context of Genesis 2-3 that the words of 3:16 — "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" — do not announce God's created design for a male hierarchy. Rather these words announce a cursed existence because of a broken relationship between the human creation and the Creator. A restricted place for woman, and male-over-female dominance, is thus not divine purpose but an expression of human sin."²⁷

His point is that it's unwise to root our understanding of men's and women's roles in the Fall curses rather than the design of God.

Secondly, as one digs deeper, there's something different about the way Paul recounts this event here than how he typically interpreted the Adam and Eve event. Paul mentioned the Fall two other times in his letters. In Romans, he wrote,

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ... (Romans 5:12)

²⁷ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 634ff.

In Romans, Paul attributes the Fall to Adam, not to Eve. Listen to the way he writes about the same event in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22,

²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Both other times Paul references the fall of Adam and Eve, he puts the blame squarely on Adam's shoulders. Why does Paul blame Adam in the other two references to the fall and on Eve when he writes to Timothy? There are numerous suggestions, but it seems that Paul was addressing a specific issue that was taking place in Ephesus — mainly that both men and women were teaching in an ignorant and deceptive way that was leading people astray.

In Genesis 2:15–17, when God issued the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, **the woman had not yet been created — since "Adam was created first"** (1 Timothy 2:13). The command was given in Genesis 2:15-17 and the woman was created in Genesis 2:22. She wasn't present to receive God's instruction directly, so if she knew what God had commanded, it must have come from the man relaying those words. In Genesis 3:1–3, during Eve's conversation with the serpent, she misquotes God's command by adding words he didn't say. Somehow, what Eve understood and what God told Adam were two different things.

Even though Paul references the creation and fall narratives, he's emphasizing a certain part of this story to make a culturally grounded point. It's a logical fallacy to assume that if Paul uses an illustration from creation he must be making a universal mandate. **It seems more in line with what's actually said within the passage itself to interpret Paul highlighting in his teaching that Adam was created first and heard the command directly from God, while the woman, having received it secondhand, was deceived.**

The second reason traditional complementarians give for Paul's prohibition against women teaching is found in 1 Timothy 2:14. Paul wrote,

¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Timothy 2:14)

The reasoning given by some traditional complementarians is that Paul suggests that women are more easily deceived than men. If one wants to apply Paul's citation of Genesis 3 as a "once and for all time" mandate, we should be so bold as to use his same reasoning and be willing to say that we do not permit women to teach because they were created after men which implies male leadership that's in place because women are more easily deceived than men (v. 13-14). While Grudem and MacArthur draw that conclusion, few others are willing to do so.

The reasoning that Paul is preventing women from teaching because they are more susceptible to deception doesn't make sense for a few reasons. First, as previously stated, Paul has already addressed two men who walked away from their faith and were blaspheming against God (1 Timothy 1:20). Not only does the assertion that women are more easily deceived than men not hold up to internal scrutiny with the letter of 1 Timothy itself, it doesn't hold up to scrutiny within the whole of Scripture. We know Paul didn't feel that way because in 2 Corinthians 11:3, he used Eve's deception as an analogy for how both men and women can be deceived by untrustworthy teachers (see all of 2 Corinthians 11–13 for context). Finally, it doesn't hold up to external scrutiny either. There is no evidence, scientifically or otherwise, that suggests women are more susceptible to deception. So we can say with confidence that Paul didn't think women were more easily deceived than men.

Many traditional complementarians are more comfortable detaching verses 13 and 14 — meaning that they don't read v. 13 as directly leading to Paul's point about Eve being deceived in v. 14. In that case, the reasoning is more in line with what was stated above; that subversion of God-ordained roles and male headship makes the church more susceptible to deception. Once again, it's important to note that this conclusion goes well beyond what's stated in the text. One must draw a conclusion about headship being implied by v. 13 and that subversion of headship is what led to Eve's deception. The reality is, all

Paul states is that man was created first and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Walter Kaiser's conclusions about this passage are quite good. He wrote,

"On the basis of this data, at least two reconstructions of the situation in Timothy's congregation at Ephesus are possible: (1) the women in the church at Ephesus were the primary advocates and promoters of the heretical teachings which were upsetting accepted patterns of congregational and home life; (2) the women in the church had been particularly influenced by the heretical teachers. Such a situation in the Ephesian church is addressed in 2 Timothy 3:6–9, where women, the special targets of those "who oppose the truth" (2 Timothy 3:8), become "unable to acknowledge the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

In either case, Paul's restrictive word in 1 Timothy 2:11–12 must be understood within a context where false teaching is at issue. The general prohibition against all those who "teach false doctrines" (1 Timothy 1:3) is now focused specifically on the women who have fallen prey to such false teaching or who are involved in its promulgation."²⁸

His reading seems to be correct. We think it's best to interpret Paul's reference to the order of their creation, not as an assertion of male authority or prominence in teaching within the gathered assembly, but as an observation about the Genesis account and its connection to the way things were going awry in Ephesus. **He was explaining why the woman, rather than the man, was deceived (Adam was created first), and it appears that the same kind of deception was happening in Ephesus.** Women were not educated in the same manner that men were and many had been influenced and deceived by the cult of Artemis. In Paul's illustration, they are in a similar position to that of Eve. So, their teaching and leading were full of deception, something Paul addresses because it is out of alignment with the way of Jesus.

The cultural influence of Ephesus becomes even more clear when one continues reading verse 15. There Paul wrote,

¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:15)

Scholars have struggled with this passage, trying to understand it rightly, but also to maintain a soteriology that's consistent with the whole teaching of the Scriptures — mainly that we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). Why would Paul state that women will be saved through childbearing? Remember, Grudem's reasoning was,

The phrase "through childbearing" is probably best understood as an example of being obedient to God's calling on one's life. Women are not to teach or govern the church, but God has given them a special responsibility, the awesome responsibility of bearing and raising children."²⁹

While it is indeed an awesome responsibility and joy to raise children, is that what Paul has in mind here? The cultural context matters. Artemis, the primary goddess worshiped in Ephesus at the time, was the goddess of fertility and childbirth (amongst other things). There was a fear amongst many women that if they did not worship Artemis, they would die during childbirth. Paul is not asserting that childbirth saves any woman, but rather, that women can trust Jesus to save them through childbirth rather than having to rely on Artemis.³⁰ **This was a way to bring them the freedom to fully trust Jesus and completely cut ties with their pagan roots.**

When read and interpreted in this manner, verses 13–15 fit together to make the unified point that what was being addressed by Paul was not that women were subverting the God-ordained order of male headship, but that they were teaching and believing in error. This is the very reason Paul wrote the letter of 1 Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3–4).

²⁸ Ibid, 634ff.

²⁹ Grudem, 882ff.

³⁰ *Why Women Must Learn in Quietness and Submission: Xenophon of Ephesus and 1 Timothy 2* (Gary Hoag) for more information on the cultural context of Ephesus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsyQlaC0btY>

Two final considerations are worth noting. First, **the age delineations about when someone becomes a man (or woman) are arbitrary and often not accounted for.** Most churches that hold to a traditional complementarian view that restricts women from teaching men have no problem with women teaching children, but when does a boy become a man? At what point is the woman's teaching no longer appropriate? If a young man turns 18 during their senior year of high school, is it appropriate for him to listen to teaching that comes from a female director or intern? Is teaching that would have been good and appropriate a week before now unbiblical because the boy has become a man? We don't have a biblical chapter and verse about when a boy becomes a man; that age is culturally defined. If the mandate for women to not teach men is universal and not cultural, we ought to have a strong conviction and guidance around when a boy becomes a man so that we can prevent them from listening to women teach. The fact that we don't have this information suggests that the issue of preventing men from listening to women teach is not one of great importance — nor was it a focus of the Early Church.

Second, there are currently significant disciple-making movements around the globe being led by women teachers. Women are active leaders and teachers in the church all around the world. The movement of Jesus that's currently sweeping through Iran is primarily led by women.³¹ In addition, the underground church in China has a strong female presence within its leadership. These are just a couple of examples of the way God is working around the globe. Would we be so brazen as to say these women should stop their teaching ministries? If we are consistent in our application 1 Timothy 2:12, we would have to say these movements go against the teaching of Scripture and are therefore not from God. John MacArthur does make this statement. He wrote,

"It is significant that Paul, who wrote this passage, was himself the greatest missionary the world has ever seen. Yet he made no exceptions for the mission field. God does not violate his principles for the sake of expediency."³²

He's consistent in stating that since the mandate is grounded in creation and therefore for all places and times, there is no church where the command doesn't apply. He's right in stating that one would have to say that the hundreds of thousands of people who have come to faith through the faithful preaching of these women, often at the peril of their own lives, have come to faith in error and been led astray and directly into sin.

Most are unwilling to go as far as MacArthur does, which suggests that most people actually do view Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 2:12 as cultural; we simply have a church culture that has a tradition of having male preachers, not a biblical conviction that this is the way it must be.

In summary, **the conclusions** we draw from 1 Timothy 2:11-15 are:

- A woman is prohibited from teaching with "authority", but Scripture doesn't give anyone the right to teach "authoritatively." Women are allowed to teach in a non-authoritative way, the same way a man is allowed to teach.
- Women must learn quietly, not in a way that interrupts worship. (v. 12)

The **reasoning** we follow is:

- What's happening in Ephesus is a reflection of what happened in the garden. Adam was created before Eve and she wasn't present to hear God's command firsthand. (v. 13)
- This led to her being deceived and becoming a transgressor. The same kind of deception and false teaching was taking place in Ephesus. (v. 14)
- Women can cut ties with the deception they'd learned in Artemis' cult — primarily that they need to trust in the goddess for protection in childbirth. They can fully trust Jesus to save them. (v. 15)

We feel these conclusions and the reasoning better follow the flow of the passage, 1 Timothy as a whole, and align with the entirety of Scripture.

³¹ See *Sheep Among Wolves* documentary.

³² MacArthur, 87.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

The second text worth considering is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In that passage, Paul wrote,

² Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. ³ But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. ⁴ Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. ⁵ But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head.

⁷ For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. ⁸ For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; ⁹ for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. ¹⁰ Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.

¹¹ However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman.

¹² For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.

¹³ Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? ¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, ¹⁵ but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. ¹⁶ But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:2-16)

Those who hold to a traditional complementarian view, suggest that Paul makes this hierarchy clear in verse 3 when he states, "Man is the head of a woman." This view rests on interpreting "head" as "authority." However, it's important to ask what the word "head" means in 1 Corinthians 11. That is not an easy task in general, but it's complicated by the fact that Paul moves from using it literally (v. 7) to metaphorically with a sense of liquidity in the passage.

In Greek, the word we translate "head" is the word "kephalé" and there are two main ways one could interpret it. First, it could mean "authority over." It would read, "Christ is the authority over man, man is the authority over woman, and God is the authority over Christ." While that's the common reading for many, it's not the best interpretation for several key reasons.

The second option is to interpret "head" as "origin of." This reading is more in line with the context of the passage as a whole. In fact, Paul makes it clear that he's using the word in that way later in the passage. In 1 Corinthians 11:8 he wrote,

⁸ For man does not *originate from woman*, but woman from man...

And in 11:12 he wrote,

¹² For as the woman *originates from* the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.

It's clear from these two verses that his discussion is primarily about origin. In this case, it reads, "The origin of every man is Christ," meaning that Christ is the agent of God in creation. This was affirmed previously in 1 Corinthians 8:6. The next phrase would read "The origin of woman is man." That's alluding to Genesis 2:21-23, a passage of Scripture Paul references heavily in 1 Corinthians 11. Genesis 2:21-23 reads,

²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called Woman,
because *she was taken out of Man.*"

Man is the origin of woman because she was taken from man's side. The final phrase of the triplet would read, "The origin of Christ is God." Christ is the Messiah, and the origin of the Messiah is God. In the language of the Nicene Creed, "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God." Or as Gordon Fee says in support of this perspective, "It refers to the incarnational work of Christ."³³ This was another way of affirming Christ's divinity. In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul's concern is not about subordination, but about origin and gender distinction. He uses the word "head" in that way throughout the passage. He is very interested in what happened in creation because what happened in creation matters for worship.

What is often overlooked by those who hold to a view of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 that limits the roles of women, is that the proposed hierarchy does not seem to affect praxis at the church in Corinth. While there is much debate about 1 Corinthians 11, **it's crystal clear that both men and women are praying and prophesying during the worship gatherings in Corinth.** They do so preserving their distinct male and female nature (they are biblically complementarian), but they serve in what appears to be an interchangeable manner in the roles of prayer and prophecy.

What does Paul mean by prayer and prophecy? We understand prayer quite well, but the word "prophecy" is a bit challenging to define because it means two things. It means to foretell, as in looking to the future. It also means to forthtell. Leading commentator Anthony Thiselton says prophecy in this case is, "The public proclamation of gospel truth as applied pastorally and contextually to the hearers."³⁴ Some might consider the role of prophecy in the first-century church to be similar to what we call preaching today. That's the reason Paul didn't address preaching directly in 1 Corinthians 11 or 14 — both sections where he explicitly addressed public worship gathering. He covered what we view as preaching in his instruction about prophecy (1 Corinthians 11:4-5; 14:29-33). When it came to the functional role of prayer and prophecy, men and women did it equally; they simply dressed a bit differently when they were doing it — the women wore head coverings.

In conclusion, far from restricting women's roles in worship services and as leaders within the Christian community, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 does the exact opposite. Women are seen functioning in the same manner as men, they are simply dressed differently while they do it. They maintain their full femininity as they serve the body of Christ.³⁵

1 Corinthians 14:33-35

The third passage that seems to prohibit women's exercise of leadership gifts in a church setting is 1 Corinthians 14:33-35.

³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. (1 Corinthians 14:33-35)

At first glance, it seems obvious that women should remain silent in church. However, to understand what Paul is instructing, one must read the passage in the context of the rest of the chapter.

First, Paul previously wrote,

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

³³ Fee, Gordon. *New International Commentary on the New Testament: 1 Corinthians*.

³⁴ Thiselton, Anthony. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*.

³⁵ For a more comprehensive explanation of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, see Ryan Paulson's sermon, *Culturally Sensitive, Biblically Grounded*: <https://www.efcc.org/services/culturally-sensitive-biblically-grounded/>

It's hard to sing a hymn or give teaching and remain silent. And yet he explicitly says to "each one" to come ready to teach and sing. Paul is either contradicting himself, or he's referring to something else when he says that "women should remain silent." Secondly, in chapter 11 Paul wrote that women were to pray and prophecy during the gatherings. Praying and prophesying would necessitate speaking and not remaining silent. So we know that he's not telling women to remain silent at all times because he's already said they can teach, prophecy, and pray during the gathering.

What, then, is Paul talking about? **This is the third time he's told a group of people to keep silent.** First, writing to those who were bent on speaking in tongues during the service he said,

"... if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent ..." (14:28)

If there is no interpretation, keep quiet. Then he said to those who wanted to prophesy,

³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. (14:30)

In both cases, the instruction to keep silent is intended to preserve order in the worship gatherings. Remember, "God is a God of peace, not confusion" (v. 33). It seems that there was a group of women in the Corinthian church who were asking questions during the service and that it was causing chaos — similar to an uninterpreted tongue or multiple prophecies taking place at the same time. Hence the call for them to "ask their husband questions at home" (v. 35). Asking questions during the gathering was causing chaos and confusion — the very thing that Paul is addressing throughout this passage.

At Emmanuel Faith, we have never, to our knowledge, interpreted or applied this passage to say that women must be silent in church, nor have we used it to limit the roles of women in our public worship gatherings. We currently have and have historically had women serving in many roles during worship gatherings. It seems this passage is about preserving order in the gathering, not about limiting roles.

The Role of Pastor

Emmanuel Faith has historically held that women are unable to serve in the role of pastor. An Elder white paper received in 2005 served as a guiding document for many years and it read, "A woman is not to usurp authority over the man. She holds no responsibility in the local church in which she exercises authority or dominion over men. This would prevent a woman from serving as an elder or a pastor." However, before we adopt this position, it would be wise to discern whether it's a biblical or cultural conviction. Doing so will help us know how tightly we should hold to our praxis.

The New Testament identifies three leadership roles in the church: elders, bishops (overseers), and deacons. Elders and bishops/overseers are equated with one another and the title seems to have been used interchangeably within the New Testament (Acts 20:28). While there are numerous other gifts listed (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers), these do not seem to have been viewed as specific roles within the early church. This is exhibited in the fact that Paul gives the command to appoint elders in every city (Acts 14:23), but there is no command given to install apostles, prophets, evangelists, or pastors.

In addition, Paul gives the church the explicit qualifications of elders and deacons, however, he doesn't give the qualifications or requirements of any other office. This supports the proposition that elders (equated with bishops and overseers) and deacons were the two leadership offices in the early church, with elders being charged with the leadership role. Dr. John MacArthur captured this sentiment when he wrote, "Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder. It is the elders who are charged with teaching, feeding, and protecting the church, and it is the elders who are accountable to God on

behalf of the church."³⁶ The early church was clearly led by a plurality of elders, and it appears these elders were men.³⁷

The term "pastor" is included as a part of this study, not because we believe it to be an office of the early church, but rather to point out the lack of evidence for there being such a role. The word "poimēn" is the Greek word often translated as "pastor." It is used as a noun at least 18 times in the New Testament. The majority of the time it refers to a literal shepherd — one who tends sheep. However, when the term is used to describe a person who is called to care for and protect the people of God, it refers only to Jesus (John 10:10; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4 etc.). It is unlikely that a believer in the early church would have known a "pastor" other than Jesus. Surely, the elders pastored (Acts 20:28), and others were called to use their gift of pastoring in the church (Ephesians 4:11), but there is no evidence of such a title being used.

Some maintain that the roles of elder and pastor are synonymous and used interchangeably in Scripture. MacArthur wrote,

"Bishops and pastors are not distinct from elders; the terms are simply different ways of identifying the same people."³⁸

Many make this same mistake, but the role of pastor and elder are never equated in Scripture. The passage coming closest to equating the two roles is 1 Peter 5:1-3. It reads,

¹ So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

There is no doubt or debate that elders are called to pastor (verb) the flock, but they are never called pastors (noun). While the position of elder is clearly equated with bishop or overseer (Titus 1:7), the role of elder, bishop, or overseer is never once equated with the position of pastor. We could say elders are called to pastor, but one could not say that pastors are called to elder.

Emmanuel Faith has historically made the distinction between pastors and elders. We have some pastors who serve on the Board of Elders and some who do not. There are currently numerous pastors who are not elders — which has been common over the past few decades. This would suggest Emmanuel Faith's historic praxis is in line with the observation that pastors are not necessarily elders. The implications of such an observation are numerous, but the most pertinent to our study is trying to decide whether or not women should be eligible for the role of pastor. The argument has typically been made that women cannot be pastors because the role of elder is typically limited to a male (1 Timothy 3:2). While a discussion of whether or not the passage makes that claim is outside of the scope of this paper, the point is, if elders and pastors are not synonymous, this argument would be irrelevant. One would have to go to other verses to find the qualifications for the role of pastor and then see if being a male was in fact one of the qualifications — however, those verses do not exist.

The fact that Jesus is the only pastor we read about in the New Testament means we do not have a list of qualifications for pastor — because it was not a recognized role in the New Testament. One might say while the role of pastor is not an *unbiblical* role, it is an *extra-biblical* role. If that is the case, we don't have biblical guidelines to define the qualifications for the role, but rather we use the Scriptures to form biblically grounded, culturally nuanced qualifications for the role of pastor. **It's our conclusion that because we do not have a biblical mandate to have only male pastors, the role ought to be open to**

³⁶ MacArthur, John. *Answering the Key Questions About Elders*:

<https://www.gty.org/library/articles/451016/answering-the-key-questions-about-elders>

³⁷ See Kenneth Bailey's paper Women in the New Testament for a contrarian view of the commonly held assumption that all elders were men. https://godswordtowomen.org/women_new_testament.pdf

³⁸ Ibid.

both men and women who qualify for the role based on a common criterion that does not include gender.

In conclusion to our discussion of the relevant passages, we acknowledge that this portion has been quite detailed and lengthy, but we believe it was necessary. The leadership at Emmanuel Faith places great importance on Scripture, and we aim to ensure that our theology and practice are grounded in a well-informed, thoughtful, and accurate interpretation of the Bible. Since the biblical texts discussed have historically played a key role in supporting a traditionalist and hierarchical view of men, women, and leadership, we dedicated significant attention to their analysis. Our intention has been to demonstrate that these passages not only fail to clearly prohibit women from teaching or serving as pastors in the local church but, in fact, lean in the opposite direction. While we respect that other Christians may hold differing perspectives, we are moving forward with the convictions restated below.

Headship

The concept of headship is one of the most debated topics in modern Christian thought, especially as it relates to gender roles, marriage, and church leadership. At the heart of these debates is the Greek word *kephalē*, translated as “head” in English, which appears in several key New Testament passages. How we interpret *kephalē* can shape our understanding of authority, leadership, and even the essence of relationships between men and women in both the church and family. To approach this issue faithfully, we must ask two important questions: What did *kephalē* mean in its original context? And how should we understand its theological significance in light of the New Testament?

There are two primary passages in the New Testament that address the idea of headship — 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5. In each of those passages, the Greek word *kephalē* is used. In the New Testament, *kephalē* can mean a literal head that’s part of a body (1 Corinthians 11:7), but it’s often used as a metaphor as well. To complicate matters, it’s sometimes used literally and figuratively in the same passage (see 1 Corinthians 11). There are three ways the word *kephalē* is used as a metaphor. *Kephalē* can mean authority (Ephesians 5:23), it can mean source (1 Corinthians 11:3), and it can mean primacy (Colossians 1:18). While all of these metaphors are related and interconnected, they each carry a different nuance and focus.

The main question people have when it comes to headship and the discussion about women in church leadership revolves around whether or not God has appointed men (and only men) to be the head (or leaders) within the church. It’s important to understand that God has set up different spheres of authority within his world. While there are likely more spheres of authority, the most common are the church, marriage, the family, the workplace, and society at large through the government. Each of these subsets has different authority structures that allow things to operate in an orderly and effective manner.

The Scriptures speak to each of these leadership structures, giving the contours of the way each is to operate. In fact, Ephesians 5 gives us instruction on four out of the five identified spheres of authority. Paul wrote,

²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. (Ephesians 5:23)

Christ is the head of the church and the husband is the head of the wife. Later in the passage he writes, Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (Ephesians 6:1)

We see that parents are the leaders of their children. Finally, he says,

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ ... (Ephesians 6:5)

Paul is suggesting that employees are to obey their employers. So, in one section of Scripture, we have four different structures of leadership. Then, we can look to Romans 13 to see the structure God has put in place for government when Paul wrote,

¹ Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. (Romans 13:1)
 So citizens are to be subject to the authority of the government.

As defined by Scripture, the different spheres of leadership look like this:

Realm	Church	Marriage	Family	Workplace	Civil
Leader	Christ	Husband	Parents	Employers	Government

A few things are worthy of note when it comes to the discussion of women in church leadership. First, it's unwise to combine or collapse realms of authority. While God has made husbands the leaders in marriage, that does not necessitate that men are leaders of the church, the home, the workplace, or the government. Each structure that God has set up should be honored in its rightful place. Much of the debate around women's roles in church leadership is founded on the premise that since husbands are the head of the wife, men should also be the head of the church. That is a faulty assumption that collapses two different realms of authority.³⁹

This causes two main problems. First, Paul clearly already stated who the head of the church was, Jesus. In fact, he makes this clear again in Colossians when he writes,

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. (Colossians 1:18)

Men are not the head of the church, Christ is the head of the church. The authority structure is clear. Paul indeed set up elders in every church. Acts 14 recounts this for us,

²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

However, the elders only lead under the leadership of Christ as the head, they don't replace his headship. There can only be one head, and Christ is the head of the church.

The second problem with assuming that men are the head or authority in the church is that this assertion is found nowhere in Scripture. It's read into Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:13, but in that passage, Paul only states that "man was created first, then woman." He doesn't make any statement about headship or leadership. It would be more accurate to say that Christ is the leader of the church and elders are commissioned to lead under Christ as they shepherd the flock of God. The distinction could be made between elders and the rest of the congregation, but not between men and women.

One final note on headship in marriage is worthy of consideration. At first glance, Ephesians 5:22-23 seems to reinforce a hierarchical model of marriage, where the husband has authority over his wife in what could be interpreted as a domineering way. However, Paul previously stated, "submit to one another" (Eph 5:21), and his analogy of Christ's headship over the church offers a deeper insight into what biblical headship truly means. Christ's headship is defined by self-sacrificial love and service, not by domination or control. Paul goes on to say, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

In this context, headship is redefined as sacrificial love and care. Rather than asserting authority, the husband's role as head mirrors Christ's role as a servant-leader who lays down his life for the church.

³⁹ For a more complete exploration of headship, leadership, and different realms of authority, see *Recovering Biblical Ministry by Women: An Exegetical Response to Traditionalism and Feminism* by George Winston

This is consistent with Jesus' teaching in the Gospels, where leadership is defined by servanthood.

Jesus completely redefined our view of leadership when he said,

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45)

This Christ-like model of headship is radically different from worldly models of authority. Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5 is not about enforcing male dominance, but about calling husbands to embody the same sacrificial, servant-hearted love that Jesus demonstrated. When headship is understood in this way, it actually subverts traditional power structures, placing the emphasis on mutual submission and care rather than on rigid hierarchies.

Our Conclusions and Implementation

Women Teachers

We believe women are gifted and called to be teachers and preachers in the church. As previously stated, we're convinced 1 Timothy 2:11-12 refers to a specific situation at a specific church — which is why we don't have the prohibition restricting women from teaching repeatedly. Quite the contrary, we see the command for all people to be teachers. A woman's capability of preaching in the pulpit ought to be assessed in the same manner we measure a man's capability, gifting, calling, and ability to communicate God's truth in a way that ministers to people. Being male should not be a requirement for preaching during a public worship service.

Women Pastors

The role of pastor is not one the early church would have known, and therefore we do not have any listed qualifications for the role, nor do we have any gender restrictions. We believe that men and women should be assessed in the same manner as to their qualifications for the role of pastor and gender should not be a part of the decision-making matrix.

Women Leaders

Women are called and gifted to function as leaders within the church. However, we do not hold an egalitarian position because, in our opinion, the position often blurs the lines between males and females. We consider our position to be a mutualist-complementarian position. We believe that men and women were designed to complement and complete one another (Genesis 2:18), and this complementary nature takes place in marriages, personal relationships, in the pulpit, in ministry, and in the boardroom. Having a complementary pulpit would make the preaching more full, and having a complementary leadership team would make it more well-rounded. Women's voices need to be heard and valued in the upper echelons of church leadership where decisions are made.

At Emmanuel Faith, we prioritize having men and women serve together as distinct yet equal individuals, reflecting the original created order that God is in the process of restoring throughout the scope of redemptive history. Our understanding of the biblical teaching on women in church leadership is rooted in their inherent value, rather than a more myopic focus on what is permitted. We also understand that there are people who call Emmanuel Faith home who disagree with our position. As previously stated, we have always been a church that's had members who disagreed with each other on this topic. We have also, to our knowledge, been a church where respect and love were extended to people with whom we disagreed. We expect that mutual love and respect will continue to cover our disagreements.

It's good to remind ourselves that as a church community, we are not bound together through our agreement on secondary doctrinal issues. We are bound together through our love for one another (Colossians 3:14), our conviction about the Lordship of Jesus, and the doctrines that we deem essential. Those doctrines are located historically and globally in the Apostles' and Nicene Creed and locally in our church Statement of Faith. The topic of women in church leadership is one in which we can choose to disagree and still have fellowship with one another.

As we move forward as a church, it's important to our Elders that disagreement with our position and dialogue around the pertinent passages of Scripture is anticipated and welcomed. However, we want to be clear in stating that divisiveness is not welcomed. We will seek to follow Paul's command to the church to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

Our Elders understand that leading change in the area of women in church leadership is challenging and must be done in a wise way and at a manageable pace. We do not have a plan that includes a codified timeline, but we will do our best to respond to the Spirit's leading and our church body as we journey together.

Thank you for taking the time to read this paper. We hope that it's been beneficial for your learning as a disciple of Jesus. After all, that's what we're all about; *helping people live in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus.*

Official Position on Women in Leadership

Emmanuel Faith Community Church | Approved at the January 3, 2023 Elder Board Meeting
Re-approved with edits at the Sept 3, 2024 Elder Board Meeting

This position statement approved by EFCC's lay and pastoral elders is the new written statement of our position on women's roles in leadership in our church. It supersedes and replaces all prior EFCC position papers, white papers, policies, and historic guiding statements affecting the teaching ministry of the church.

Introduction

Emmanuel Faith was birthed in 1939 as an independent, Bible-believing church. There are a number of subjects about which people who love Jesus and believe in the authority of the Scriptures disagree. Their primary disagreement is often about how the truth of Scripture is to be applied in our day. These are issues that aren't central to doctrine, but what some might call "non-essentials." One of those issues is the topic of women in church leadership. Some hold that women have unique roles that they are uniquely called to play within the church, and others posit that men and women are called to function in the same manner.

While the topic of women's roles within the body has been divisive in some churches, our hope is that as God moves in our midst, we might continue to have space in our church family for those who agree and disagree with Emmanuel Faith's position. Our collective hope as a body is to remember that we are bound together through our love for Jesus, one another, and in our essential doctrinal positions as a church, even though we don't always agree on secondary matters.

As we read Scripture, we see from the very beginning God created human beings male and female, and that his creation is good. Men and women were created to carry the image of God together (Genesis 1:26). They were called together to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen. 1:28) From the beginning we see that men and women are equal but different and that they are created to partner as they embrace the mandate given to them by God. We believe God's original design of men and women on mission together to fulfill God's purposes in the world also reflects the way he designed his church to function.

Below is Emmanuel Faith's position on women in leadership.

Elders

We believe the elders are called to lead and oversee God's church. (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3) They have the authority and the responsibility to guard, govern, and guide all the affairs of the church. All ministries of the church, including its teaching, fall under the oversight and jurisdiction of the elders and every member of Emmanuel Faith is in submission to the elders' leadership. (Hebrews 13:17)

As we read through Scripture, we observe that the New Testament church only had men serving as elders. (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6) While there is never a prescriptive command given in Scripture to only have male elders, and there's potential that this leadership structure simply mirrored the patriarchal society in which the church was born, male eldership indeed reflected the leadership in the early church. In the absence of a clear scriptural command, we are following the New Testament model at Emmanuel Faith, and we have made the decision that only qualified men will serve as elders, that the authority of the elders is broader than just teaching authority, and therefore all teaching and leadership authority in the church ultimately is presented under the oversight of the elder board.

Teachers

In Scripture, we read that both men and women are given the command to teach (Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Colossians 3:16). We do not make distinctions between teaching in worship gatherings and teaching elsewhere in church ministries as we do not read the Scriptures as making such distinctions. We do not read anywhere in Scripture that there are some places where teaching is authoritative and some places it is not. We deem all teaching authoritative if it aligns with the truth and intent of Scripture. Instead of giving the teacher authority, we believe that the Scriptures are the locus of authority in the church. Therefore, at Emmanuel Faith, we permit qualified men and women to teach in worship services, classrooms, and homes. All teaching that happens as a part of Emmanuel Faith takes place under the oversight of the elders.

Pastors

The role and responsibilities of a shepherd provide key understanding for the title "pastor" that we now use in the church. The Greek word translated "shepherd" or "pastor" is "poimén." It was used at least 18 times in the New Testament, but it was never once used as a title for any church leader other than Jesus (1 Peter 5:1-4). Therefore, we view the role of pastor as an extra-biblical role. It's a role recognized in the church today, but it was not a title used in the early church.

One important distinction to recognize is that elders were called to shepherd (or pastor) the church, but they were never given the title of "pastors." It's also important to note that while elders were called to shepherd the church, they were not the only ones called to shepherd (Ephesians 4:11-12). Emmanuel Faith has long held that elders and pastors are different. For decades we have had pastors who were not a part of the elder board and elders who were not considered pastors. Because we do not have any biblical guidelines as to who can serve as a pastor (since it is an extra-biblical role), we believe there is freedom in how a church uses the title. Therefore, at Emmanuel Faith, we have decided that both qualified and called men and women can hold the title and serve in the role of pastor.

Conclusion

While we don't think the terms "complementarian" and "egalitarian" adequately describe the different nuances and positions that can be held within the church, we describe our position as "mutual complementarian." By that, we mean that we affirm the truth that God has created men and women with differences. Those differences are good, yet together, men and women complement each other to

reflect the complete image of God. However, unlike many complementarians, we do not believe complementarianism necessitates rigid role distinction. We believe that a better understanding of the complementary nature of God's design is that men and women are at their best when they are together. We hold that the biblical model is that only men are to serve as elders, but we believe that women have the opportunity to serve in every other role within the church. We long to create an environment where men and women can serve God by building up His church to the fullest of their ability as the Spirit leads and empowers.

As we move forward, we will intentionally apply the convictions found in this paper in a winsome and discerning way. We recognize some will have challenges with conclusions drawn, and we want to be as loving as we can as we embrace God's future for us. To that end, we will endeavor to change at a pace people can handle, trying our best to stay in step with the Spirit's leading and guidance.

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Further Study

Books

- *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, edited by James R. Beck.
- *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem.
- *Recovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee.
- *Recovering Biblical Ministry by Women: An Exegetical Response to Traditionalism and Feminism* by George Winston
- *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism* by Wayne Grudem
- *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church* by Nijay K. Gupta
- *Neither Complementarian nor Egalitarian: A Kingdom Corrective to the Evangelical Gender Debate* by Michelle Lee-Barnewall.
- *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh Perspectives on Disputed Texts* by Lucy Peppiat.
- *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood: How God's Word Consistently Affirms Gender Equality* by Philip B. Payne
- *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* by Beth Allison Barr

Articles

- *Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View* by Kenneth E. Bailey
- *The Role of Women in Ministry at Redeemer Presbyterian Church* by Tom Gibbons
- *Women in Ministry: A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership* by David M. Scholer
- *Women Pastors, Women Preachers, and the Looming Test of the Southern Baptist Convention* by Al Mohler
- *Theologyintheraw.com*, Preston Sprinkle has written a number of great blog posts on kephalē and the Biblical meaning of head and headship.

People

- Our pastors and elders would love to meet with you to hear your questions and offer prayerful and thoughtful dialogue.



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